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EUROPE/ITALY - Migrants: "the Church calls on all parties to shoulder their respective responsibilities and identify solutions other than simply heavier sanctions on illegal immigrants or the hermetic closure of borders"

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – "We are all aware that migratory movements, especially in recent years have assumed the dimensions of real humanitarian crises. In the first place because the phenomenon has all the characteristics of a biblical exodus, increasingly devoured by the voracity of organised crime without scruples and comprising all kinds of adventures of inhuman and often sadly tragic traits. Furthermore we cannot remain silent about the arrogant reappearance of slave trafficking, which today affects at least one million persons every year, destined for the markets of prostitution, forced labour, trafficking of human organs and minor sexuality. Our prayer vigil this evening, reminds our conscience of the stories of people who, driven by the hope of reaching a welcoming land, instead on their journey of suffering and pain meet death." These words were pronounced by Archbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò, President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, during an Ecumenical Prayer Vigil which he presided at the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere on the evening of 17 June. The initiative was promoted by communities and associations of refugees and organisations of volunteers on the occasion of the annual World Day for Refugees. Recalling the many lives lost "on the journey of hope, fleeing countries martyred by difficult and at times inhuman situations", Archbishop Vegliò continued: "We have before our eyes men and women attempting to escape difficult circumstances, searching for ways to survive; motivated by socio-economic circumstances in the countries of origin and in the countries of destination; driven by the slowness and the iniquity of the process of development; not rarely victims of faulty national and international policies. Often migration is determined by poverty but it can also be its cause, just as poverty can be alleviated or worsened by migratory processes. Very frequently, however, flight to another country reduces important human resources, if we consider that in some countries it takes away as much as 60% of citizens with a higher education, leaving behind a community robbed of its best men and women."
The President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People went on to speak of the "enormous disparity which exists in society on the threshold of the third millennium: millions of people in developing countries relive the Gospel story of poor Lazarus, longing to alleviate their hunger with the crumbs which fall from the excessively lavish tables of the masters of the world". Not rarely these people risk the "crime of being outlaws" should they succeed "in entering the home of the rich man without an invitation". The Archbishop mentioned at this point the reality of irregular immigration, "which has reaped so many victims and continues to do so", and the sensitive issue of cases in which this immigration "turns into trafficking and exploitation akin to slavery of 'human flesh."
"The Church condemns such misdeeds and demands regulated management of migratory flows – said Archbishop Vegliò -, acknowledging with great realism that industrialised countries, not always able to absorb the whole number of those wishing to immigrate, must adopt measures to guarantee security and legality for both citizens in the hosting country and for the new arrivals. At the same time, the Church calls on all parties to shoulder their respective responsibilities and identify solutions other than simply heavier sanctions on illegal immigrants or the hermetic closure of borders. These solutions include interventions which go further than verbal declarations for development in the country of origin, so as to promote a serious fight against human traffickers, rational programmes for flows of regular entrance, greater willingness to consider individual cases demanding interventions of humanitarian protection and political asylum; lastly, it is necessary to safeguard the right to family reunion, a guarantee for cohesion and stability for individuals and for society."
At the end of his homily the Archbishop said "besides normative plans, therefore, there is need of patient and ongoing work of formation of minds and consciences ". Therefore education should be based on the values of

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acceptance, understanding, solidarity, co-existence and conviviality while “it is necessary to control and remove the tangle of impulses and attitudes which take the different shades of suspicion, prejudice, intolerance and rejection as far as the most exasperated forms of xenophobia and racism”. (S.L.) (Agenzia Fides 18/6/2010)

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